

Nature Photography

**On The Road
in
California**



Alan and Elaine Wilson

Nature Photography

California



A Blurb BookWright Publication

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CALIFORNIA QUAIL - ADOPTED AS CALIFORNIA'S BIRD SYMBOL IN 1931

Preface

California's principal geographic regions include the spectacular eastern fringe of the Sierra Nevada mountains, four coastal ranges in the west, the fertile farmlands of the Central Valley between them and the arid Mojave and Colorado deserts in the southeast. It is home to some of the world's most exceptional trees: the tallest (Coast Redwood), most massive (Giant Sequoia) and oldest (Bristlecone Pine). It also possesses an extensive seacoast that houses an immense array of birdlife. California has recorded more than 600 bird species, almost two-thirds of the North American total. The state is a linchpin in the Pacific Flyway, the migratory route traveled by millions of birds each year. The natural sustaining habitat – the shorelines, wetlands, oak woodlands, deserts and forests – include what the National Audubon Society characterize as 175 of the most “Important Bird Areas” in the lower 48 states. As such, ferreting out productive photography locations looked to be somewhat of a daunting task. However, we decided to focus on species that were not native to our home base in British Columbia such as Brown Pelicans, Marbled Godwits, Long-Billed Curlews as well as Greater Roadrunners, Cactus Wrens and specific passerines more typical of desert habitat. This led us to several spectacular south coast locations in Huntington Beach, San Diego and Moro Bay as well as two desert hotspots near Borrego Springs and on the Salton Sea.

Along the way, it was difficult not to be drawn into many landscape opportunities, especially along the eastern fringe of California as it slices off a thin strand at the edge of a vast interior biome, the Great Basin. As the eastern slope of the 400-mile-long Sierra Nevada merges with the western edge of the Great Basin, desert valleys sporting hot summers and snow-spangled mountains hosting cold winters lie side by side. The Eastern Sierra is a dramatic, unusual, mountain-and-desert region. Here the Mono Basin, with its crown jewel of delicate calcium-carbonate knob and spire formations at Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve exemplifies the character of this expansive cold-adapted sagebrush steppe intermixed with hardy forbs and grasses. It is also the access point to the hidden gold mining ghost town at Bodie State Historic Park. From there it is only a short distance to the awesome scenery at Yosemite famed for its giant, ancient sequoia trees, Tunnel View, the iconic vista of towering Bridalveil Falls and the granite cliffs of El Capitan and Half Dome. Nearby the incredible autumn colors surrounding Mammoth Lakes makes for a great early fall adventure.

The images in this book cannot do justice to the incredible diversity that California has to offer. They are simply birds, wildlife and natural landscapes that we were lucky to encounter and photograph on our travels. Although the awesome bird life was the prime focus of our travels, the natural landscapes and whatever wildlife happen to punctuate our visits were never far from mind when selecting prime locations.

Alan D. Wilson and Elaine R. Wilson
Vernon, British Columbia

Coastal Birds and Wildlife

Although the California coastline stretches for over 1350 kilometers, we visited only five locations whose urban areas offered reasonable public access for bird and wildlife photography, including San Diego, Huntington Beach, Morro Bay, San Simeon and Moss landing. This is a relatively short stretch of coast in southern California but incredibly productive from a photography perspective. Although our quest was the breeding Brown Pelican and hopefully a host of shorebirds, we were treated to two unexpected surprises, Northern Elephant Seals and Sea Otters.

Our first coastal foray started in Huntington Beach at the Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve where we joined other photographers on the boardwalk each morning to await whatever would show up and begin to feed in the nearby lagoon. By midmorning, we would generally pack up and head to the Upper Huntington Bay Ecological Reserve, especially if the tide was coming in as this usually attracts shorebirds to feed in the sandy shallows. In the late afternoon we discovered that the City Pier was a good place for flight shots as Western or Heermann's Gulls constantly mooch scraps from the fisherman. At days end, we headed for the San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary as it's a haven for Black-Necked Stilts and a great location to take advantage of the evening light.

Just three hours south in the La Jolla area of San Diego is Cove Cliffs, perhaps the best location in California to photograph Brown Pelicans. Although there is a wooden viewing platform, we opted to bypass the crowds and move down the upper cliff to better position for behavior or portrait images. To our delight there were not only Brown Pelicans but also Brandt's and Double-Crested Cormorants that were returning from feeding to preen and rest. Wind, light and the physical number of birds soon dictated what was achievable in such cramped quarters. Although there were rules restricting access, the number of

WESTERN GULL

Santee Lakes Recreational Preserve near San Diego, California



photographers often verged on intrusive. However, the birds seemed accustomed to human traffic and preened or slept quite contently. From here, it's a short walk to the Children's Pool at the San Diego La Jolla Underwater Park. This is an ecological reserve and a great location to photograph Harbour Seals as they return in the surf after feeding to bask on the hot sand. It's a well-known birthing site and our visit was timely as there were several new born being suckled by their mothers.

We generally spent the afternoon at nearby Shores Beach. It's an easy walk at low tide and a good location for shorebirds on either side of the pier at the Scripps Institute of Oceanography. Another great afternoon location was the Santee Lakes Recreation Preserve. With "chicken scratch" for bait, we were entertained for hours photographing ducks in flight. It was a simple matter of sitting at waters edge and throwing a handful of seed in the air to attract a deluge from all directions. This is great fun and affords ample opportunity to practise flight shots on birds that would otherwise be more difficult to photograph in the wild such as such as American Widgeons, Wood and Ring-Necked ducks.

There are many good locations on the south coast for shorebirds. We enjoyed the Morro Strand State Beach just past Old Creek as you enter Morro Bay. It's a sure bet for Marbled Godwit and Whimbrel feeding in the late afternoon. We walked the surf in rubber boots and had a good time trying to capture them at eye level. A delightful location in the area is the Sweet Springs Nature Preserve in nearby Los Osos. Here we found Great and Snowy Egret's in spectacular marsh backdrops.

Besides shorebirds, a major wildlife attraction is a Northern Elephant Seal colony that sets up house between early December and late February at Point Piedras Blancas near San Simeon. Viewing is either from a boardwalk with docents present to supervise and answer your questions or from several Vista Points along the highway. We spent several days trying to capture images of the newborn "pups" or maturing "weaners" as they suckle, squawk and joust for position along the beach. Alpha males are incredibly large animals and covered in battle scars as they fight for dominance. We arrived in the middle of February when fewer animals were present but the opportunity to isolate individuals was much easier. However, photography here requires a fair amount of patience. It's not easy to isolate a clean animal as they are generally covered with sand and either sleeping or roaring at each other, mostly over territory. Mating at this time of year is mostly over so the males have stopped fasting and returned to a regular

feeding pattern. The best activity was in the early morning when the males return from foraging and joust for position on the beach.

As we progressed up the coast, we were surprised by the venue that greeted us at Moss Landing. It's absolutely a haven for Sea Otter, Brant's Cormorant, Western Grebe and Sea Lion. It's a small area but we soon discovered the best locations were Moss Landing State Beach on Jetty Road, the breakwater at the end of Sandholdt Road and the Yacht Club Marina just off the highway on Moss Landing Road.

As we progressed north, we soon abandoned bird and wildlife photography and began to concentrate on capturing the essence of the coastline. We started at the bluffs that overlook Whaler's Cove next to the Pigeon Point Light Station and worked our way up the Cabrillo Highway to Half Moon Bay. The wave action on the rocks and tide pools can be very dramatic so we ventured into many roadside pull-offs and approached the shoreline looking for exciting compositions. We were determined to return to Monterey Bay and the rugged San Mateo coastline as the area had what we felt was the potential for some tremendous landscape compositions.



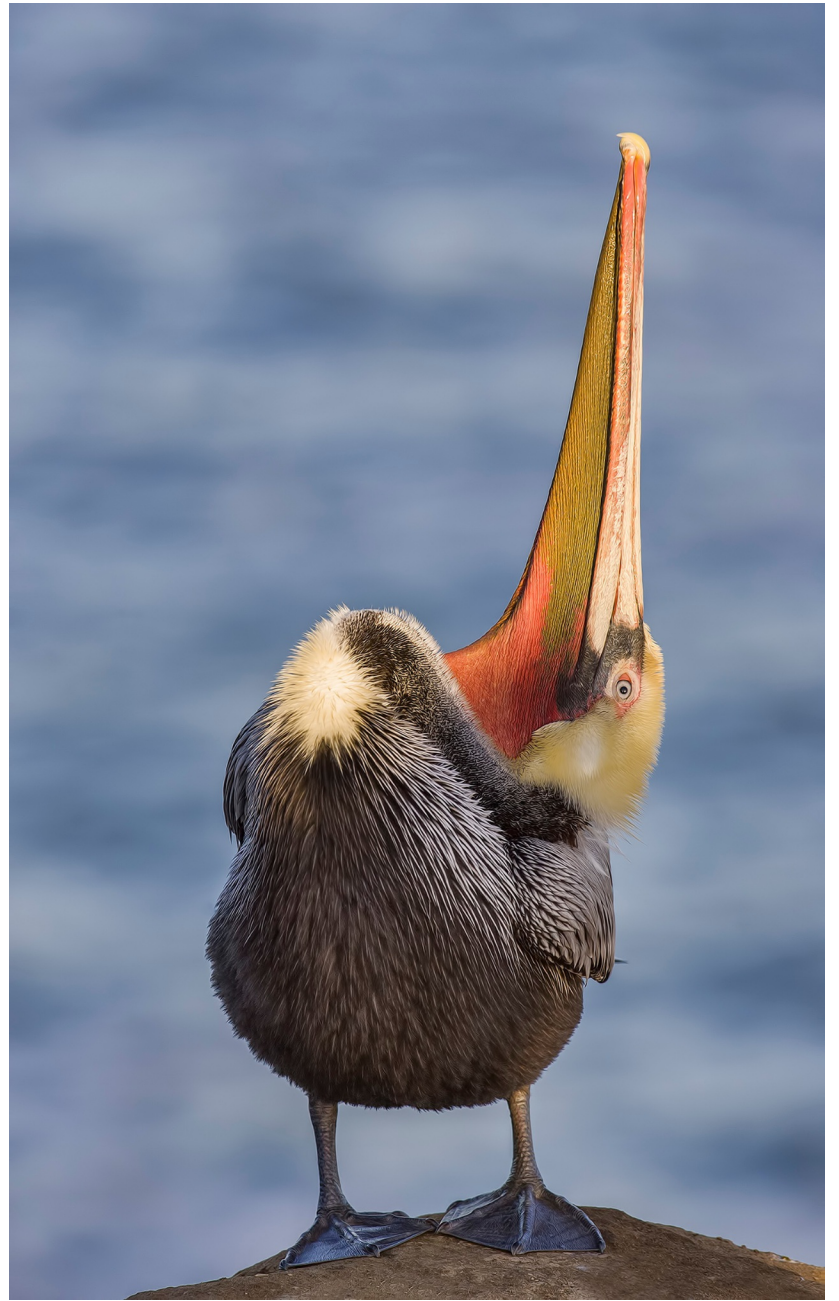
HARBOR SEAL

Children's Pool, San Diego Underwater Park (Ecological Reserve),
La Jolla, California



HARBOR SEAL

Children's Pool, San Diego Underwater Park (Ecological Reserve),
La Jolla, California



BROWN PELICANS

Cove Cliffs, San Diego Underwater Park (Ecological Reserve), La Jolla, California



BROWN PELICAN

Cove Cliffs, San Diego Underwater Park (Ecological Reserve),
La Jolla, California



GREAT EGRET

Sweet Springs Nature Preserve, Los Osos, California

SNOWY EGRET

Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve,
Huntington Beach, California



LONG-BILLED CURLEW

Strand State Beach,
Morro Bay, California





WESTERN GREBE

Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve, Huntington Beach, California



COMMON LOON
South Harbor, Moss Landing, California



SNOWY EGRETS

Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve, Huntington Beach, California



FEMALE BUFFLEHEAD

Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve,
Huntington Beach, California

WILLET



AMERICAN AVOCET

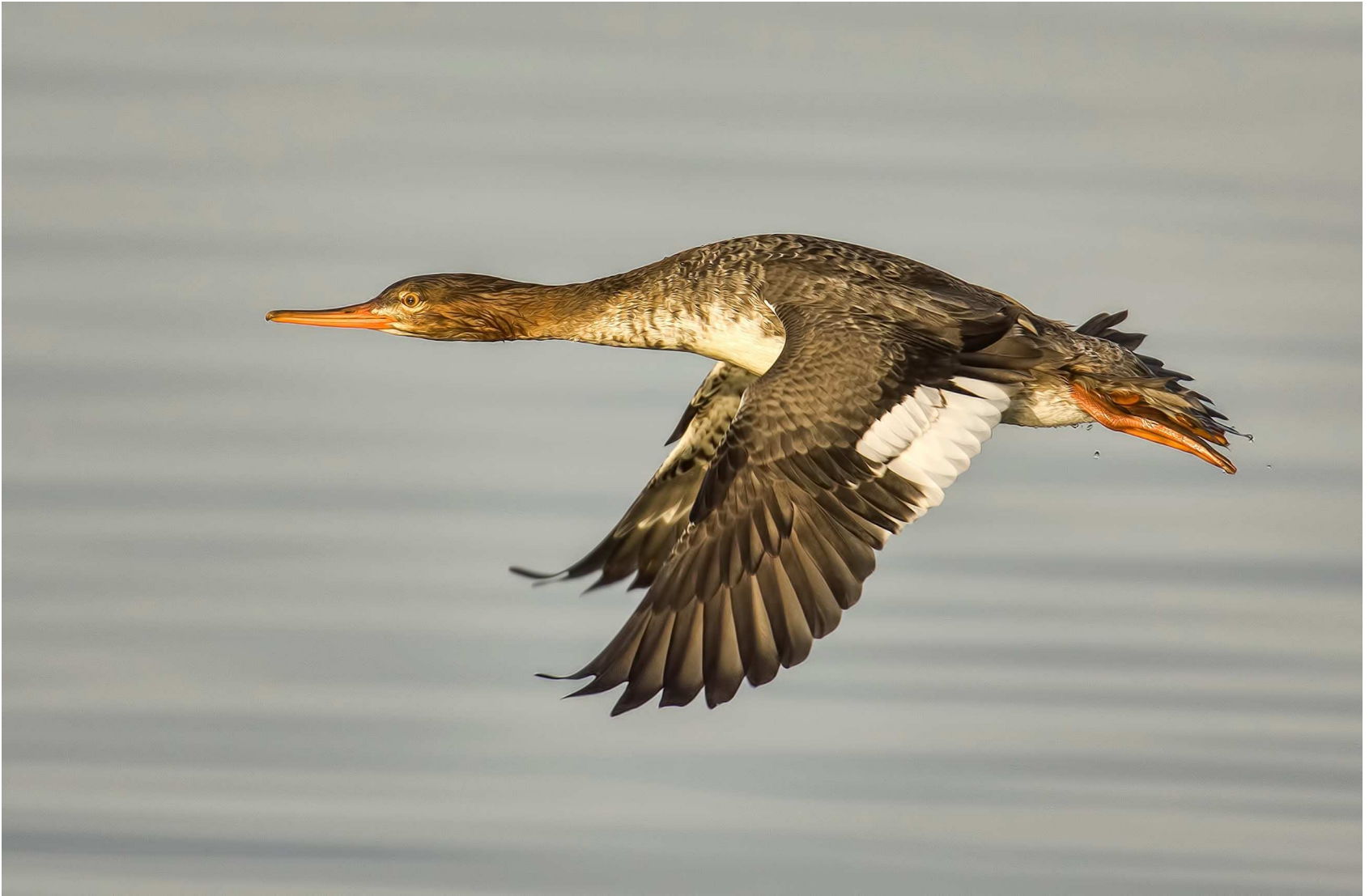


BLACK SKIMMER



MARBLED GODWIT

Back Bay,
Newport Beach, California



RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (FEMALE)
Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve, Huntington Beach, California



**NORTHERN ELEPHANT SEAL
(PUP)**

Point Piedras Blancas, California

**NORTHERN ELEPHANT SEAL
(MALE)**

Point Piedras Blancas, California



**NORTHERN ELEPHANT SEAL
(MALE)**

Point Piedras Blancas, California



**NORTHERN ELEPHANT SEALS
(WEANERS)**

Point Piedras Blancas, California



DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT

Cove Cliffs, San Diego Underwater Park (Ecological Reserve),
La Jolla, California



BRANT'S CORMORANT

Cove Cliffs, San Diego Underwater Park (Ecological Reserve),
La Jolla, California



BROWN PELICAN
Vista Point near San Simeon,
California



RUDDY TURNSTONE
Vista Point near San Simeon,
California



CALIFORNIA GROUND SQUIRREL
Vista Point near San Simeon, California

BROWN PELICANS
Cove Cliffs, San Diego Underwater Park
(Ecological Reserve),
La Jolla, California







AMERICAN WIGEON

Santee Lakes Recreational Preserve, San Diego, California

MALLARD (FEMALE)

Santee Lakes Recreational Preserve,
San Diego, California



MALLARD (MALE)

Santee Lakes Recreational Preserve,
San Diego, California



MALLARD (FEMALE)
Santee Lakes Recreational Preserve, San Diego, California



RING-NECKED DUCK (FEMALE)
Santee Lakes Recreational Preserve, San Diego, California



WOOD DUCK (FEMALE)
Santee Lakes Recreational Preserve,
San Diego, California



WOOD DUCK (MALE)
Santee Lakes Recreational Preserve,
San Diego, California



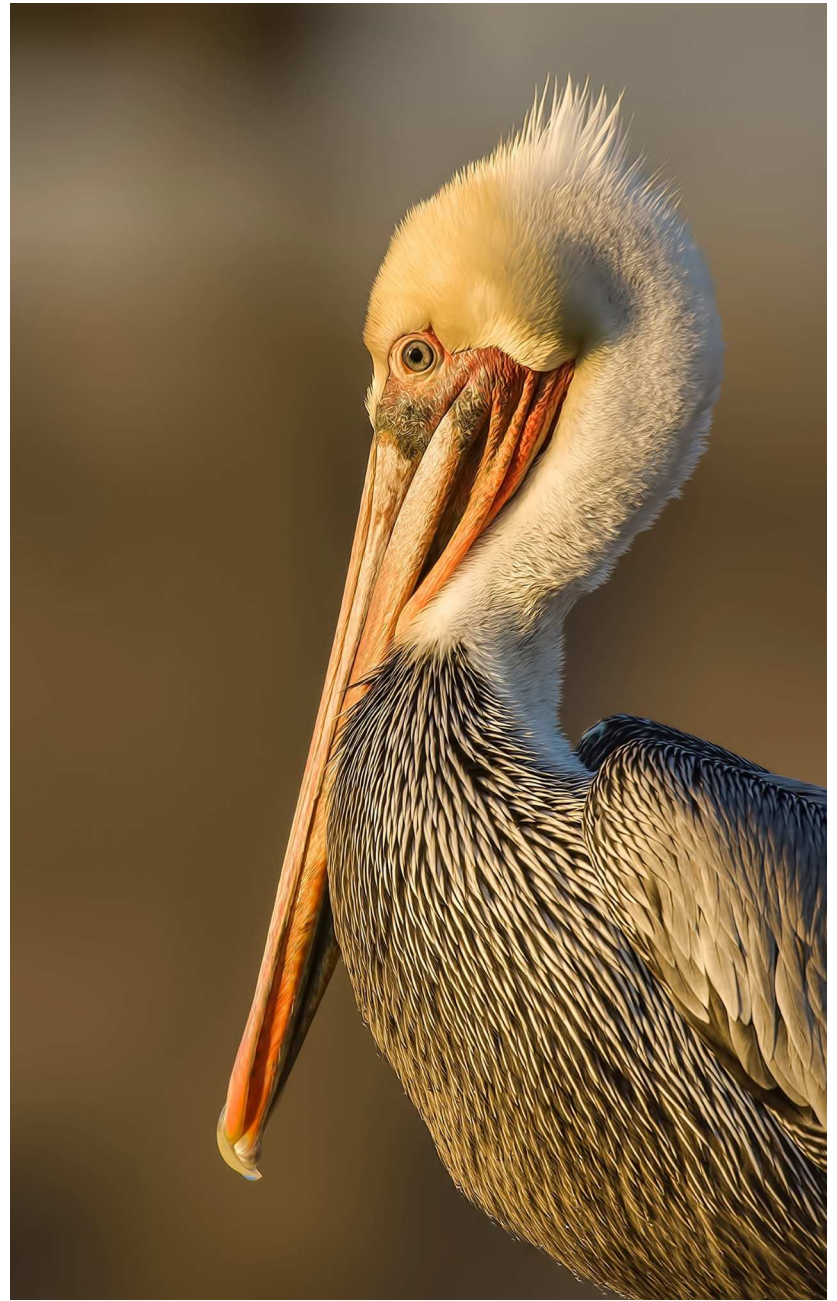
WOOD DUCK (MALE)

Santee Lakes Recreational Preserve, San Diego, California



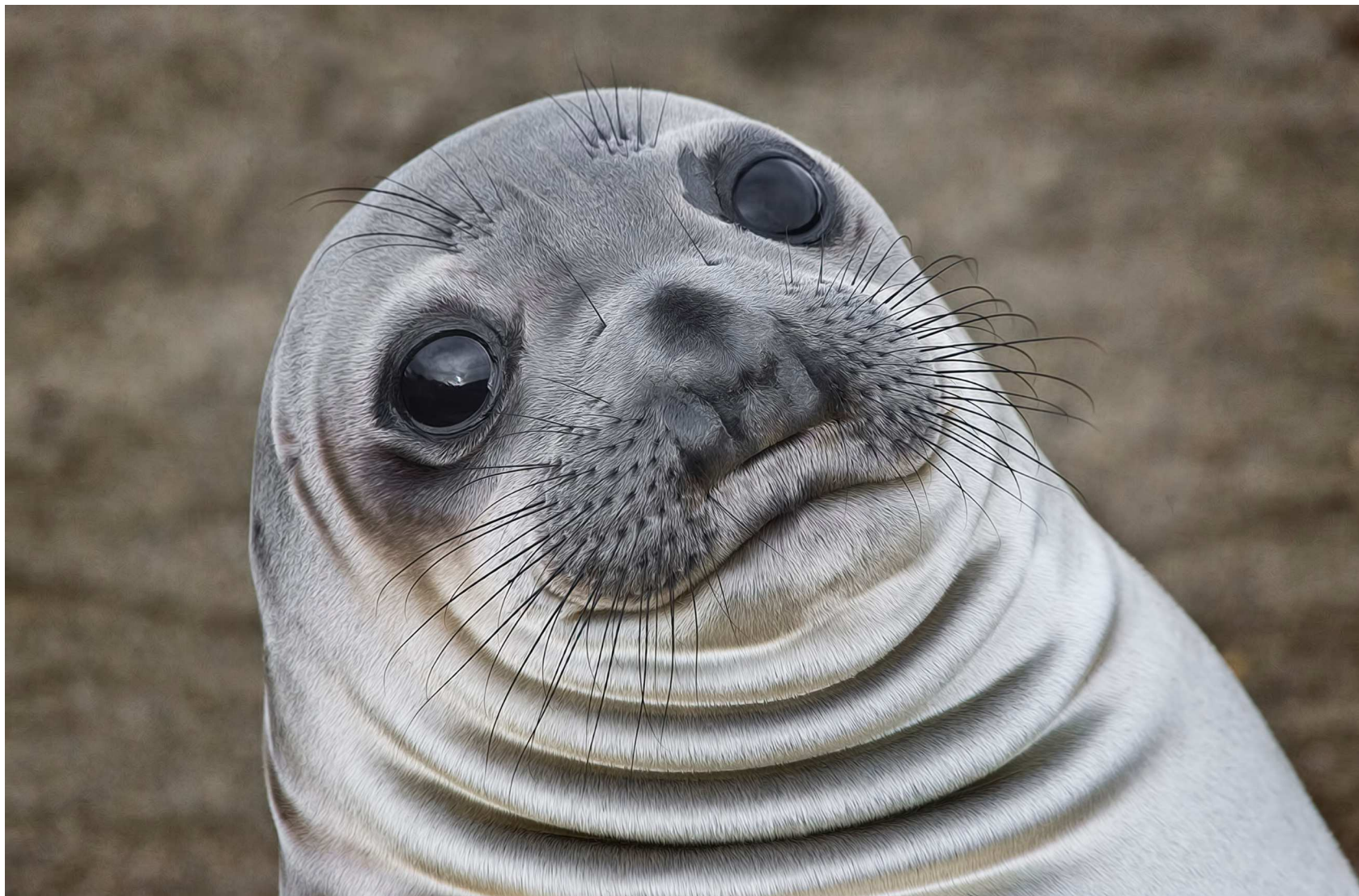
BROWN PELICAN (JUVENILE)

Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve, Huntington Beach, California



BROWN PELICANS

Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve, Huntington Beach, California



NORTHERN ELEPHANT SEAL (WEANER)
Point Piedras Blancas, California



NORTHERN ELEPHANT SEAL (JUVENILE)
Point Piedras Blancas, California



SEA OTTER

Jetty Road, North Yacht Harbor, Moss Landing, California



SEA LIONS

Sandholdt Road, South Yacht Jetty, Moss Landing, California



NORTHERN ELEPHANT SEALS (MALE)
Point Piedras Blancas, California



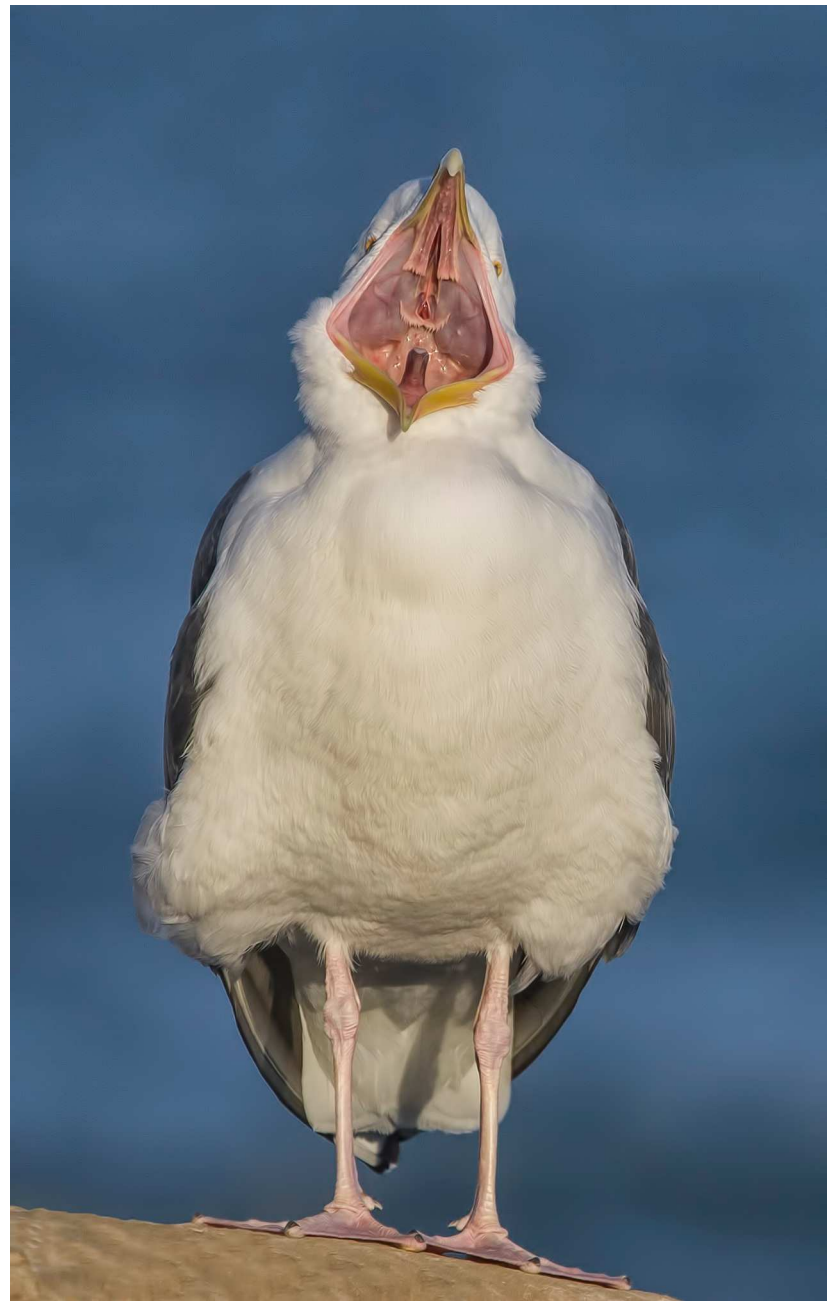
NORTHERN ELEPHANT SEALS (MALE)
Point Piedras Blancas, California



HEERMANN'S GULL
Cove Cliffs, San Diego Underwater
Park (Ecological Reserve),
La Jolla, California

RING-BILLED GULL
Cove Cliffs, San Diego Underwater
Park (Ecological Reserve),
La Jolla, California





WESTERN GULLS

Cove Cliffs, San Diego Underwater Park (Ecological Reserve), La Jolla, California



MARbled GODWIT

Shores Beach near Scripp's Pier, La Jolla, California



BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER
Shores Beach near Scripp's Pier, La Jolla, California



RED-TAILED HAWK
Cabrilo Highway near Pescadero, California



WHITE-TAILED KITE

Cabrilo Highway near Half Moon Bay, California



CASPIAN TERN

Back Bay, Newport Beach, California

BROWN PELICAN (JUVENILE)

Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve,
Huntington Beach, California



LEAST TERN

Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve,
Huntington Beach, California



BROWN PELICAN

Cove Cliffs, San Diego Underwater Park (Ecological Reserve), La Jolla, California



BROWN PELICAN

Cove Cliffs, San Diego Underwater Park (Ecological Reserve), La Jolla, California



WILLET
Half Moon Bay, California

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER
Half Moon Bay, California



WHIMBREL
Shores Beach near Scripp's Pier,
La Jolla, California



BLACK-NECKED STILT

San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary near Huntington Beach, California



AMERICAN COOT

Santee Lakes Recreational Preserve near San Diego, California



NORTHERN ELEPHANT SEAL (MALE)
Point Piedras Blancas, California

SEA LION

Sandholdt Road, South Yacht Jetty,
Moss Landing, California



SEA OTTER

South Harbor, Moss Landing,
California





PIED-BILLED GREBE

Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve, Huntington Beach, California



DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT

Cove Cliffs, San Diego Underwater Park (Ecological Reserve), La Jolla, California



BLACK PHOEBE

San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary near Huntington Beach, California

SEA LIONS

Sandholdt Road, South Yacht Jetty,
Moss Landing, California





RING-BILLED GULL

Shores Beach near Scripp's Pier, La Jolla, California



GREAT EGRET

Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve, Huntington Beach, California





Coastal Landscapes

It was several years before we decided to return to Monterey Bay and the San Mateo coastline and try our hand at landscape compositions. Here the ocean is flanked by steep cliffs that are difficult to traverse in order to gain access to the various coves and beaches that shelter the best photography locations.

We arrived in the late afternoon and headed for Natural Bridges State Beach in the heart of the City of Santa Cruz to try our luck at a late evening sunset. This is also a well-known location to view the monarch butterfly migration between October and early February. The beach is named for the naturally occurring mudstone bridges that were carved by the ocean into cliffs that jutted out into the sea. Only the middle arch remains and is in danger of also collapsing due to erosion by wind and waves. It is a great location at sunset as the rock makes a wonderful foreground object and the image can be spectacular if the sky is punctuated with scattered cloud cover and high, cresting wave action. Unfortunately, the week we visited the sky was clear with a mild smoke haze from several late season forest fires. Translation, conditions were not conducive to capturing compelling landscape images. The adage “work with what you’re given” certainly produced some interesting challenges throughout our stay. Nonetheless, we had a good time and came away with an appreciation of the significant potential of this section of coastline for landscape photography.

Notwithstanding, it’s worth mentioning several of our location highpoints, especially early morning and late evening sites. Sunrise was best at the Panther Beach and Hole-in-the Wall Overlook, Four Mile Beach and Pigeon Point Bluffs. All provided great coastal vistas, the latter where a large lighthouse could be included in the frame. Sunsets were best at Natural Bridges State Beach, Seven Mile Beach and from the viewing stand at the end of the Garrapata State Park Bluff Trail. There were also good locations for what we would describe as interesting rock or erosion formations, most notably Point Pinos near Pacific Grove and the bluffs on the beachside of Hole-in-the-Wall at Coast Dairies State Park.

LONE GULL

Point Pinos near Pacific Grove, California



NATURAL BRIDGES STATE BEACH
Santa Cruz, California



SMOKE HAZE SUNSET

Hole-in-the-Wall, Coast Dairies State Park near Davenport, California



SUNSET

Bluff Trail, Garrapata State Park near Carmel, California



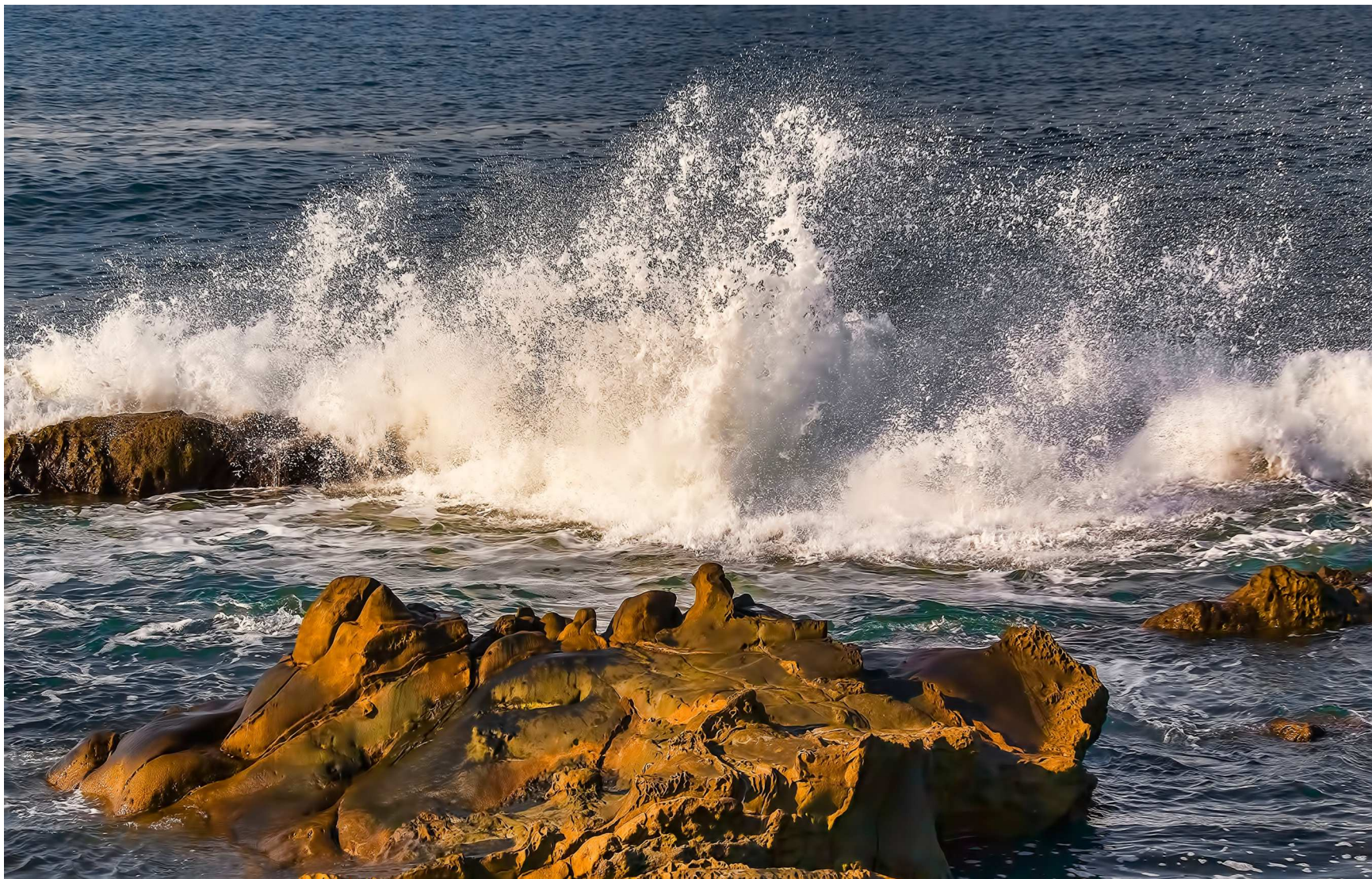
SUNRISE

Pigeon Point Bluffs near Ano Nuevo State Park, California



SUNRISE SURF

Pigeon Point Bluffs near Ano Nuevo State Park, California



SUNRISE SURF
Pebble Beach near Pigeon Point Bluffs, California

Inland Birds and Wildlife

Our inland bird and wildlife photography focused on three distinctly different but equally prolific areas.

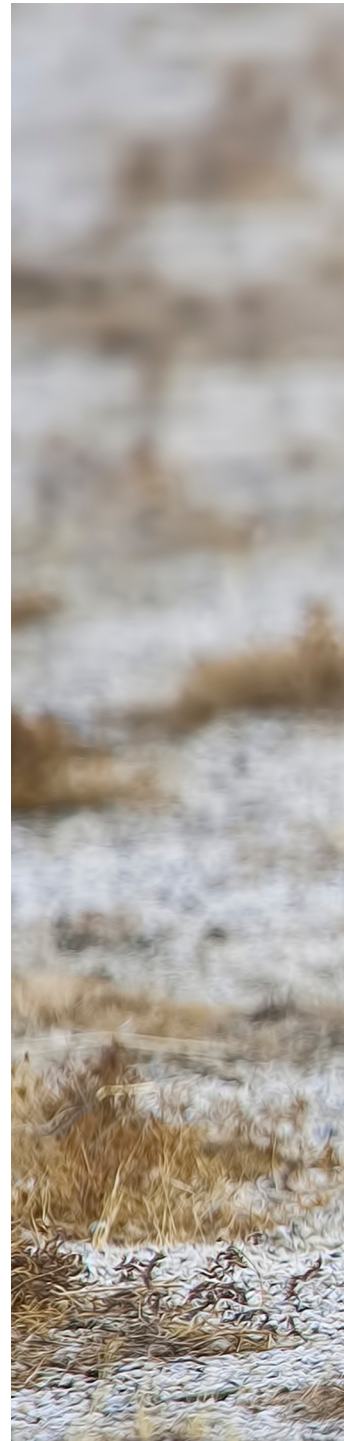
Firstly, the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park in southern California which is the largest in California and the second largest in the contiguous United States. The park is an anchor in the Mojave and Colorado Deserts Biosphere Reserve and contains bajadas and desert washes, rock formations and colorful badlands, large arid landscapes and mountains. It is noted for natural springs and oases with the state's only native palm, the California Fan Palm. The oases are prolific with many types of fauna, especially for bird-watching. It's also crowded with wildlife. Throughout the park, visitors may encounter Bighorn Sheep, Kit Fox, Mule Deer, Coyotes and Black-Tailed Jackrabbits.

A second gem is the Salton Sea, a shallow, saline rift lake located in California's Imperial and Coachella valleys. While it varies in dimensions and area with fluctuations in agricultural runoff and rainfall, the Salton Sea is the largest lake in California. It has been termed a "crown jewel of avian biodiversity," housing over 400 documented species. The most diverse and probably the most significant populations of bird life in the continental United States are hosted here, rivaled only by Big Bend National Park in Texas. It supports almost a third of the remaining population of the American White Pelicans. It is also a major resting stop on the Pacific Flyway.

Lastly, we discovered many opportunities in the Klamath Basin as it's an area that houses six National Wildlife Refuges as well as a host of other productive wetlands, grasslands, parks and farm roads. It's a large area that stretches from slightly east of Crater Lake in southern Oregon to the California state line. It was usually our last stop before heading home from field trips to the southwest. Our favourite haunts were

BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT

Anza Borrego Desert State Park, Borrego Springs, California





in the Tule Lake and Lower Klamath areas. Here we drove miles of well-maintained auto routes through open marsh and canal infrastructure. This is strictly window and bean bag territory where a long lens and teleconverter are a must. Photography at this level is not everyone's cup of tea. However, we “worked” the area, including the farm roads to the east of the Butte Valley National Grassland. It turned out to be quite productive as the marshland made for decent backdrops and many of the birds we encountered displayed colorful breeding plumage. Although the Visitor's Center offers eight photo blinds on a fee and reservation basis, except for the Hill Marsh location, we found many of them either poorly placed or in such a state of disrepair as to be unusable. This was hardly a calamity, as without a breeze the mosquitos were incredibly bothersome. We’ve never done this area justice despite returning several times. It’s a haven for Eared Grebes and Ringed-Neck Pheasants, although tough to pin down in a good setting.

BURROWING OWL

Salton Sea near Niland, California





BLACK-THROATED SPARROW

Anza Borrego Desert State Park, Borrego Springs, California



GREATER ROADRUNNER

Anza Borrego Desert State Park, Borrego Springs, California



LESSER GOLDFINCH (MALE)

Palm Canyon Resort,
Borrego Springs,
California



MARSH WREN

Hill Road Marsh,
Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge,
California

CACTUS WREN
Anza Borrego Desert State Park,
Borrego Springs,
California



LESSER GOLDFINCH (FEMALE)
Palm Canyon Resort,
Borrego Springs,
California



AMERICAN KESTREL

Cibola National Wildlife Refuge near Blythe, California



EARED GREBE

Varner Harbor, Salton Sea State Recreation Area, California



BLACK-TAILED GNATCATCHER

Anza Borrego Desert State Park,
Borrego Springs,
California



VERDIN

Anza Borrego Desert State Park,
Borrego Springs,
California



COSTA'S HUMMINGBIRD (FEMALE)

Anza Borrego Desert State Park, Borrego Springs, California



AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (MALE)
Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge, California



WESTERN GREBES
Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge, California



COSTA'S HUMMINGBIRD (MALE)

Anza Borrego Desert State Park, Borrego Springs, California

ABERT'S TOWHEE
Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge,
California



EARED GREBE (MALE)
Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge,
California



BURROWING OWL
Salton Sea near Niland, California



WHITE-TAILED ANTELOPE GROUND SQUIRREL
Joshua Tree National Park near Palm Springs, California



RUDDY DUCK

Varner Harbor, Salton Sea State Recreation Area, California



AMERICAN AVOCET

Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge, California



BURROWING OWL
Salton Sea near Niland, California

GREEN HERON

Varner Harbor,
Salton Sea State Recreation Area,
California







Eastern Sierra and the Mono Basin

The centerpiece of mid-eastern California is the picturesque calcium carbonate spires at the Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve. This is located east of Yosemite National Park in a basin between the Sierra Nevada, White and Excelsior Mountains. It is a great location for photography at both sunrise and sunset, especially for longer exposures in the South Reserve taken while painting the tufa formations in the dark with a flashlight. It can be a truly phenomenal photography experience, especially if the wind abates (which isn't often). We were lucky one afternoon when the calm water created spectacular reflections. The clouds here can also produce some tremendous opportunities, especially at sunrise and sunset. We walked the beach for roughly a mile south of Navy Beach and found several more formations that were in a colorful setting as the grass had turned a bright golden hue with the approach of winter.

Visiting the Eastern Sierra also provides an opportunity to take in what remains of the gold mining town at Bodie State Historic Park. This location can be a bit disappointing from a photography perspective as the natural setting of the buildings within the town site is now less than five percent of its peak, leaving what you would think is little of the ambiance that a late 1800's settlement of ten thousand people with sixty-five saloons would engender if left in either a pristine or slightly decaying condition. Unfortunately, the town was subject to a fair amount of looting prior to the State claiming it as a historic site. It is currently in an "arrested state," meaning that repairs are underway to what is left of leaking roof tops and sagging floors to give the place a look that hopefully mirrors the original layout. Despite the attempt to waylay the vagaries of time, Bodie still houses enough natural elements that positioning can eliminate most of the restored look to make the experience worthwhile.

The local mountains also house many mining ruins. One location of interest was the Chemung Mine. It's a morning location and a tremendous sunrise opportunity. It's a nightmare to drive as the road deteriorates rapidly and it's also easy to get lost as there is a honeycomb of side roads throughout the area.

CALCIUM CARBONATE SPIRE

Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve near Lee Vining, California



ABANDONED VEHICLES
Bodie State Historic Park, California



VINTAGE BUCKBOARD
Bodie State Historic Park, California



SUNSET

Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve near Lee Vining, California



SUNRISE

Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve near Lee Vining, California



SUNRISE

Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve near Lee Vining, California



NAVY BEACH

Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve near Lee Vining, California



NAVY BEACH
Mono Lake Tufa State Natural
Reserve near Lee Vining,
California

CALCIUM CARBONATE SPIRE
Mono Lake Tufa State Natural
Reserve near Lee Vining,
California



CALCIUM CARBONATE SPIRE
Mono Lake Tufa State Natural
Reserve near Lee Vining,
California



NAVY BEACH
Mono Lake Tufa State Natural
Reserve near Lee Vining,
California



HOME KITCHEN
Bodie State Historic Park,
California



CARRIAGE SHED
Bodie State Historic Park,
California



GENERAL STORE MINE REFLECTION
Bodie State Historic Park, California



OUTHOUSE
Bodie State Historic Park, California

GENERAL STORE
Bodie State Historic Park,
California



SNOW SLED
Bodie State Historic Park,
California

Yosemite

Yosemite National Park is best photographed in the fall and winter months, especially when the weather cooperates with good cloud structure and fresh snowfall. As the park faces west, the light is generally better during late afternoon and evening, most notably on the Northside Drive and at Tunnel View. It's also a great park for night photography at Glacier Point and El Cap Meadows although air traffic can become problematic if capturing star trails is on the agenda.

We entered Yosemite through the Tioga Pass, a narrow, often rock-strewn road that meanders through dense forests offering little in the way of compelling photography opportunities. One exception is Siesta Lake, a small, calm, roadside gem that produced some interesting reflections of the forest shoreline. Our real adventure started at the Merced River next to the Lodge at the Falls. Here we worked the morning light as it penetrated the golden hue of the fall aspens. Sunset found us at Glacier Point where we photographed the last rays on the Half Dome, staying on to try our hand at flashlight painting on the trees with the Milky Way as a backdrop.

Yosemite in the late fall is all about volatile weather. During a five-day period in early November we experienced clear skies, placid water reflections, fog, wind, storm clouds and snow. There is no better location to experience this than the vista from Tunnel View. Capturing fall colors is best done by working the Merced River along the north and south river drives, making frequent stops to look for compelling scenes, especially those with water reflections. One we enjoyed was the Valley View of El Capitan at the bend in the river just before the Pohono Bridge. We found the key to getting good fall images was to target the valley locations up to Tunnel View and cycle through each three or four times during the day looking for good opportunities.

Unfortunately, there are no waterfalls at this time of year as the spring snow melt has long since dried up. Vernal Falls was little more than a garden hose and the Upper and Lower Yosemite falls were nonexistent.

CHAPEL

Southside Drive, Yosemite National Park, California







EL CAPITAN
Yosemite National Park, California



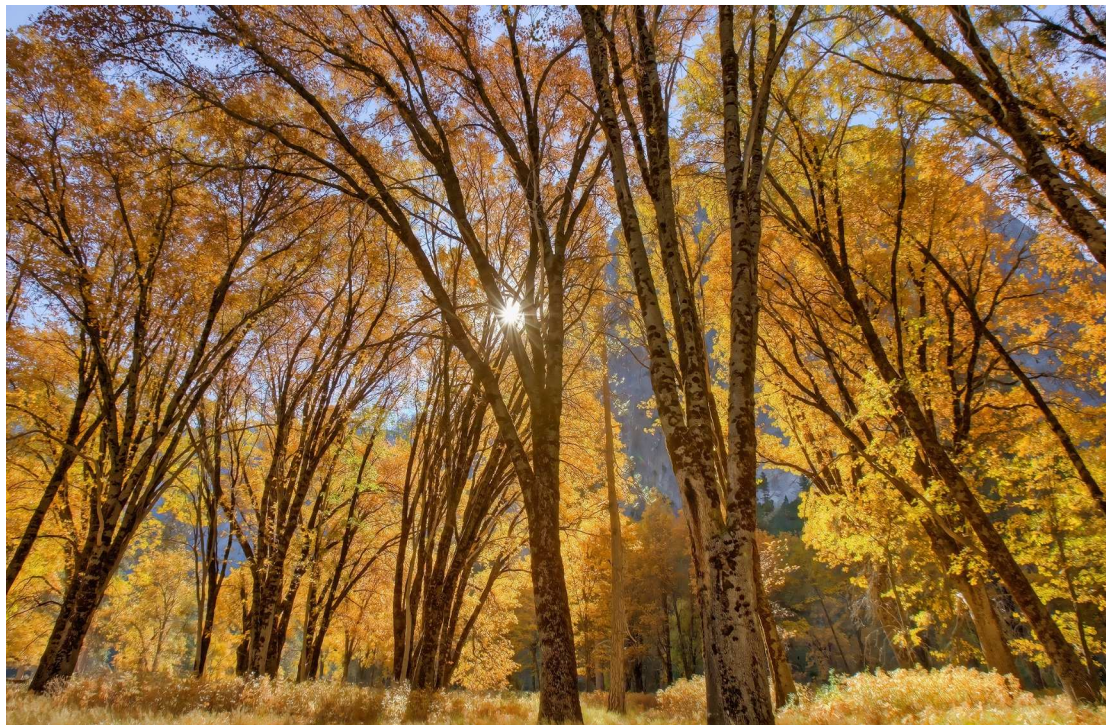
TUNNEL VIEW
Yosemite National Park, California



MERCED RIVER REFLECTIONS
Yosemite National Park, California



MERCED RIVER REFLECTIONS
Yosemite National Park, California



MEADOWS
Lodge at the Falls,
Yosemite National Park, California



POHONO BRIDGE
Yosemite National Park, California





EL CAPITAN
Valley View, Yosemite National Park, California



EL CAPITAN
Meadow View, Yosemite National Park, California



MERCED RIVER
Southside Drive, Yosemite National Park, California



MERCED RIVER

Southside Drive, Yosemite National Park, California



**PIXEL BENDER OIL PAINTING
SEA OTTER "SIESTA AT SEA"**

Our Photography Journey...

The adventure began during the latter part of our careers when we started to ponder the question of what to do during our retirement. We had no objective in mind but finally settled on the combination of travel and nature photography as something that might be an interesting pastime. After months of agonizing research, we became early adopters of Canon's transition from film to digital camera bodies. What started as an overwhelming introduction to an emerging and complex technology soon mushroomed into somewhat of an obsession, especially as we progressed from wandering around local habitat searching for compliant subjects to attracting birds to "sets" we designed and photographed from a blind in our back yard. As we became more proficient behind the camera, we decided to focus our attention on travelling to locations in western North America, targeting sites known for outstanding bird, wildlife and natural landscape photography. Although our approach to stalking subjects "in-the-wild" produced some compelling images, we soon learned that most eye-catching exposures are the result of set-piece creations where subject behavior and ambient light are manipulated in a controlled setting. This is most readily achieved when photographing birds. The concept of "Birds as Art" was first introduced by Arthur Morris and subsequently taken to unprecedented heights as an artform by Alan Murphy. Both photographers raised the bar for what eventually became a photographic standard and one we passionately pursued as an adjunct to the traditional approach of simply searching for subjects in their natural habitat.

Not surprisingly, we were soon overcome with the urge to display and share our images. We began by producing web graphics and hosting an educational blog online for beginner photographers. As the sophistication of the digital darkroom evolved, a host of programs began to appear that elevated post-processing techniques to a new and exciting level. This led us to not only improve our web graphics but also to experiment in-house with the production of large prints on specialty media, including textured watercolor paper and canvas. During this time, we became overwhelmed by the emerging world of digital art, a niche genre designed to create stunning special effects from photographs. At the time of publication, our favorites were Pixel Bender, a Photoshop plug-in with an Oil Paint filter and LucisArt, a standalone program that creates incredible watercolor renditions. Both programs became mainstays in our Photoshop workflow.

This book is our self-published attempt to showcase, in print, a selection of photographs from California.

California

Nature Photography

Bird, wildlife and natural landscape photography is an enjoyable and absorbing pastime. It's also an immense amount of fun! The advent of the digital camera and image enhancement software has had a significant impact on what was once the domain of professionals and serious amateurs. Today, it's an accessible and affordable hobby, no matter what your level of entry.

Like most photographers, we were soon overcome with the urge to display and share our images. We began with web graphics of photographs captured at outstanding locations throughout North America, including: Alaska, Alberta, Arizona, British Columbia, California, Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, Wyoming and selected sites we visited in Western and Eastern Canada.

This book contains selected images from our travels throughout California.

